

Connecticut Department of Transportation

State Project No. 58-335

100% State Funded

**Stone Masonry Wall Rehabilitation Along US Route 1
Town of Groton**

August 27, 2020 7:00 p.m.

Virtual Meeting via MS Team Live Event and YouTube Live

Minutes of Public Informational Meeting

In Attendance: There were 31 people in attendance. The meeting participants included residents and representatives of the Town of Groton, the Connecticut Department of Transportation, and BL Companies.

Presentation: A Public Information Meeting was held for this project on the night of August 27, 2020. This meeting was held virtually via MS Teams Live Event and YouTube Live. At 6:45 p.m. the meeting went live with an informative introductory slide for attendees to view prior to the event. The formal presentation began at 7:00 p.m. Transportation Supervising Engineer Louis Bacho began the presentation by introducing the representatives of the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT), as well as BL Companies (BLC), the Consultant Liaison Engineer and Designer. Louis Bacho, CTDOT Transportation Supervising Engineer, and Greg Gerrish, BLC Senior Engineer, gave a twenty-minute PowerPoint presentation describing State Project No. 58-335, the Rehabilitation of a Stone Masonry Wall on U.S. Route 1 in the Town of Groton. Matt Geanacopoulos with the CTDOT office of Rights-of-Way also presented information regarding the rights-of-way acquisition process.

The presentation included the following items:

- The existing conditions of the stone masonry wall and railing, including the wall location, existing traffic, temporary traffic protection, and structural elements of the stone wall
- The purpose and need for the project describing the deteriorated metal pipe rail and stone masonry wall
- The proposed rehabilitation of the stone masonry wall including design elements, construction limits, temporary impacts to traffic, and detour duration
- Design considerations regarding the historic nature of the wall and downtown Mystic area
- Utility, environmental, and rights-of-way impacts
- Project schedule, construction cost, and project funding

Public Comments and Questions: Following the formal presentation, a live Question and Answer session was opened to the attendees. The questions and comments below were provided via voicemail, email, and MS Teams Live Event chat:

- Chat question: What is the impact on Library Street, High Street, and West Main Street?

A representative of BL Companies provided a plan view of the intersection and responded that the construction limits end at the intersection. However, the northbound lane of U.S. Route 1 within the project area will be detoured around the construction area via State routes for approximately 3 to 4 weeks during construction.

- Chat question: Why would the trees need to be removed in order to construct this project? The removal seems unnecessary.

A CTDOT representative stated that the Department is investigating all possibilities to avoid removing trees. It is understood that the trees provide visual screening for the nearby residents. The wall rehabilitation work [repointing] can likely be done without affecting the trees and the only reason foreseen for removal at this time would be due to unhealthy trees, as determined by a licensed arborist. Trimming may be needed to improve sight line from the High Street intersection.

- Email question: The Mystic Historic District Commission should be consulted regarding the historic nature of the wall and the aesthetics of area. The proposed open rail isn't appropriate for the area and the existing rail should be mimicked. The wall located further down the road across from Baptist Church requires repointing and mortar.

BLC and CTDOT have had communication with the Mystic Historic District Commission prior to this meeting. This project is in the preliminary design stages and the State's main concern is to provide a rail system that addresses safety concerns and incorporate a crash rated system that meets today's standards. The maintenance concerns for the wall down the street across from Baptist Church is in fair condition to our knowledge, however, the State can take a look at the wall.

- Email question: A resident stated that they support the project but are concerned about removal of trees in the vicinity of the wall. Removal of the trees would have detrimental effects to tourist economy and the property owners abutting the wall. The greenery presents a visual and noise buffer, as well as a pleasant view. It is requested that additional considerations are taken regarding removal to the trees.

CTDOT reiterated the previous response that the Department understands the concerns of the property owners and the State is doing everything it can to save the trees. The only reason that trees would be taken down at this early point in the design would be due to unhealthy condition of the trees.

- Voicemail question: What is a construction easement?

CTDOT responded that a construction easement is what needs to be acquired when it is necessary to use a portion of private property to construct a portion of the project, but is no longer needed after the project is completed. The easement gets recorded on the land records, but once construction is completed, an affidavit is filed to extinguish that easement and the property goes back to the way it was.

- Voicemail question: A resident has a concern with the return wall affecting emergency parking for residents in the area. They would like to know what the rationale is for the return wall.

BLC responded that the reason for the return wall is eliminating the blunt end on U.S. Route 1. By extending the return wall, the blunt end that exists is eliminated. The return wall would move the blunt end out of the clear zone, creating a safer condition for the vehicular traffic travelling in the southbound lane of U.S. Route 1.

CTDOT added that the return wall will replace the temporary sand barrels with permanent traffic protection to meet current safety standards.

- Chat response to the previous question and response regarding the sand barrels and temporary barrier curb in place creating an eye sore: Is there a way to accelerate the project?

BLC responded that the project is currently scheduled to be completed in 2022, but, in coordination with the Town, the construction schedule is being reviewed to move the schedule up to the fall of 2021.

- Chat question: The size of the blunt end of the rail does not seem to warrant a 45-foot return wall. Why does the return wall need to be 45-feet long?

The end of the wall needs to be located beyond the clear zone per the design requirements. The 44-feet may seem long compared to the 6 feet of wall being removed, but the wall needs to be extended beyond the curb and High Street to meet the requirements of current safety standards.

- Chat question: As a follow up to the response regarding the removal of trees along the wall: 2022 is a long time away, will something in writing be provided regarding saving the trees?

CTDOT responded that 2022 is a conservative estimate for the beginning of construction at this early design stage and, while the fall of 2021 is desired for an accelerated schedule, there are many unknowns that may affect the construction schedule. Something in writing cannot be provided at this time, as the health of the trees will be assessed before construction begins to ensure the safety of the travelling public on U.S. Route 1. CTDOT Rights-of-Way added that any trees to be saved will be included in the value of the temporary construction easement provided in writing to the property owner.

- Voicemail question: Parking is at a premium in the area, does the return wall need to be 45 feet long?

CTDOT responded that the 44-foot return wall is a bit misleading and that much of that return wall will be along West Main Street. A representative of BLC added that the return wall will be located in the State right-of-way, so parking shouldn't be a concern in the area of the return wall. Additionally, the return wall will be located behind the existing sidewalk, providing pedestrians access across the intersection. CTDOT provided a Google Earth image to illustrate the limits of the return wall location in relation to the sidewalk to clarify that there should be no impacts to public parking.

- Chat question: What is a clear zone?

BLC explained that the clear zone of the roadway is an area free of obstacles; in this case it is the distance from the centerline of U.S. Route 1 (for vehicles travelling southbound) to the closest distance of the blunt end of the existing rail. Current

safety standards require that the blunt end is required to be farther from the centerline than the current rail and is the reason for extending the return wall away from the intersection down High Street. Additionally, the clear zone is an area for a vehicle that travels over the roadway centerline into the oncoming lane to have time to correct its path and prevent a collision.

- Chat question: What streets will be used for redirecting traffic during construction?

BLC reiterated that the detour is anticipated to last approximately 3 to 4 weeks. The detour will utilize State Routes 1 and 215. It is understood that local traffic may opt to use local roads, but the detour will be posted for state routes for commercial, truck and other traffic to utilize.

- Chat question: When did the clear zone law come to be? The railing has been in place for a while without any return wall.

BLC responded that the highway design standards are frequently revised and the design for this project will meet current requirements.

Adjournment: The email address, telephone number and project webpage address were provided for any additional questions or comments regarding the project following the meeting. Attendees were reminded that any additional comments will be received until September 10, 2020.

The presentation was well received, and the meeting was adjourned around 8:00 p.m.